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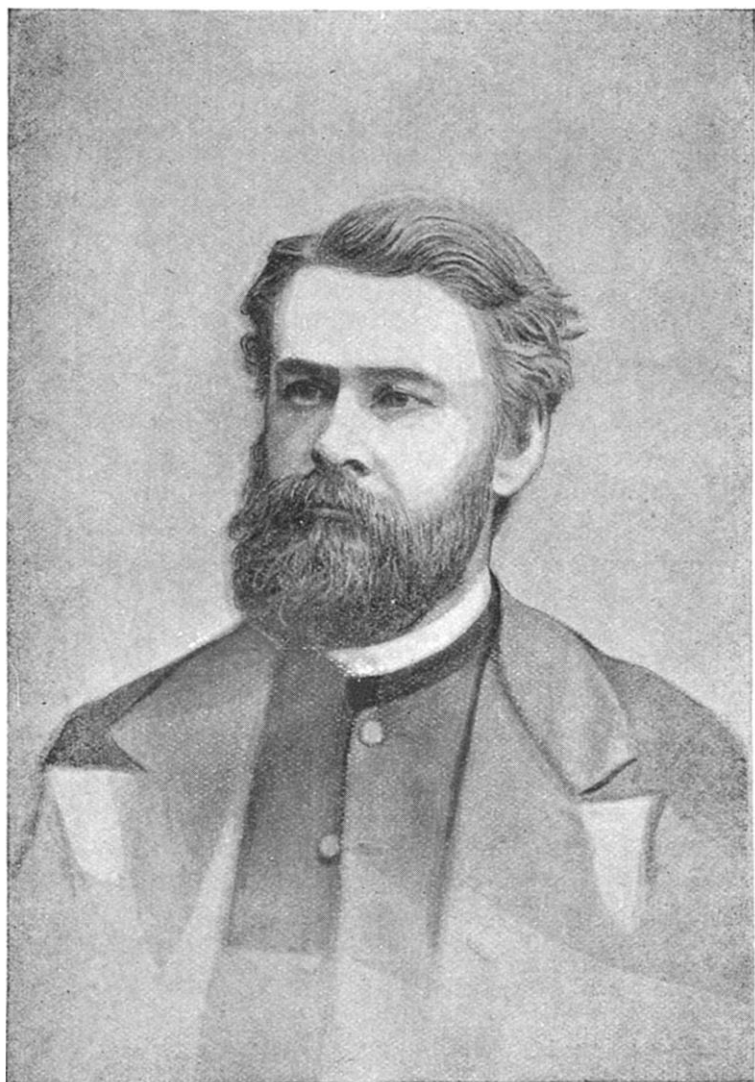
AMERICAN OLD TESTAMENT SCHOLARS:

CHARLES AUGUSTUS BRIGGS, D. D.

By JAMES M. LUDLOW, D. D.,

East Orange, N. J.

Charles Augustus Briggs was born in New York city, January 15th 1841. His academical studies were pursued at the University of Virginia, from which institution he graduated in 1860. The war-drum of 1861 drew him to the ranks, and he marched with the New York Seventh Regiment to the defence of the Capitol. They who have known him in subsequent years can see in the stripling soldier the same quickly kindled enthusiasm and fearless devotion with which the now eminent scholar is accustomed to follow up his convictions. The years from 1861 to 1863 he spent in Union Theological Seminary, where his indefatigable patience and power of intense application, together with his keenness for detail and grasp of broad principles, attracted the notice of such masters as Edward Robinson, Henry B. Smith, and Roswell D. Hitchcock. His instructors did not hesitate to predict for the young student a career of eminence. Certain reasons led him to give the years from 1863 to 1866 to business with his father; devoting, however, all leisure hours to the pursuit of his favorite studies. In 1866 he went to Germany and entered the University of Berlin where he remained until 1869, his scholarly attainments engaging the confidence and admiration especially of Drs. Dorner and Rödiger. Dr. Dorner's affection for his pupil lasted during the life of this venerable instructor, and his eager inquiries of Americans regarding young Briggs revealed the expectancy with which he watched the life of his favorite pupil. From 1870 until 1874 Mr. Briggs was pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Roselle, N. J. But a different career was rapidly opening to him. The pen of the young country pastor was sought for



Prof. CHARLES AUGUSTUS BRIGGS, D. D., of New York.

articles upon the most abstruse points of Hebrew scholarship. An article on Biblical Theology, published about the time of his settlement at Roselle, is believed to have been the first on the subject that had appeared in this country, the banner of a department in religious inquiry that has now come to overshadow that of Systematic Theology in popular interest. Writing with, or more frequently, without, his name, his work became embodied in much of the periodical biblical literature of that time. Dr. Schaff could find no better hand to assist in translating and editing Lange's Commentary on the Psalms than that of Mr. Briggs; and the student finds no more helpful paragraphs in that great volume than those marked with the then novel cabalistic sign "C. A. B."

Mr. Briggs in 1874 was elected to fill the chair of Hebrew in the Union Theological Seminary. Notwithstanding the strongest appeals from the Seminary professors, together with that of Dr. Dorner, who urged upon him the recognition of his fitness for the place, he was disposed to decline its responsibilities. He believed in a broader method of instruction in Hebrew than had been pursued in this country; one involving some acquaintance with the cognate languages; and, although thoroughly persuaded from his own experience of the excellence of the method he would propose, he was unwilling to force it upon the institution; and yet he was equally unwilling to undertake the work without its adoption. A compromise was effected according to which Prof. Briggs accepted the office provisionally for two years, during which time he would seek to practicalize his views. The experiment proved the sagacity of the young professor, and, with the heartiest approbation of the Directors, he was in 1876 installed Davenport Professor of Hebrew and the Cognate Languages.

Prof. Briggs' career as an instructor has put him in the front rank. An enthusiast for his science, he has been able from year to year to impart some of his own zeal to a large number of students. He believes that delight in such studies comes from thorough knowledge, and does not withhold information or closest argument out of deference to the dullness of any student. As a proof of both the excellency of

his method and his personal fidelity in the classroom, he finds to-day as many of his former pupils themselves occupying professional chairs as he has himself been years giving instruction.

In 1880 Dr. Briggs was largely instrumental in founding the Presbyterian Review. For ten years he was the chief of its managing editors, and contributed more matter to its pages than any other writer. The success of the Review was remarkable, and was due to its excellency. It met a want that was deeply felt in the church. While solidly evangelical, and true to the traditions of the Presbyterian Church, it was, at the same time alert for all advanced thought; its readers were not only fortified in their orthodox convictions, but informed faithfully of movements outside their immediate lines of defense. Whatever subject was of interest to the cause of religion was here debated with frankness; it being the purpose of the management, so far as Prof. Briggs could control it, to make the Review cover the entire ground of current orthodox thinking. How well this plan succeeded is witnessed by the general expression of loss since the Review has been discontinued.

Neither in this country nor in Europe, perhaps, is there a more prolific writer upon topics connected with Biblical scholarship. The Higher Criticism, Revision of Confession, Church Unity, The Intermediate State, etc., have been dealt with in numerous articles, which have always attracted attention, and which, moreover, have proved their power by the vehemence with which many of those who dissent from the views expressed have assailed their vehicle.

Among what might be regarded as *minor* productions of Prof. Briggs—we prefer to call them *brief* productions—may be mentioned the following.

Schaff-Lange Commentary on Ezra. 1876.

Inaugural Address in Union Theological Seminary on “Exegetical Theology.” 1876.

Encyclopædia Britannica, Article on Presbyterianism in the United States.

The Right, Duty and Limits of Biblical Criticism. Pres. Review, 1881.

Critical Study of the Higher Criticism, with special reference to the Pentateuch. Pres. Review, 1883.

The Hebrew Poem of the Creation. Old Testament Student, 1884.

The Poem of The Fall of Man. Reformed Quarterly Review, 1885.

Series of Articles on Hebrew Poetry, in *Hebraica*, 1886.

Opening Address to Students at Union on Biblical History. 1889.

The larger volumes from his pen are chiefly—

Biblical Study: Its Principles, Methods and History. N. Y., 1883. 2d Edition 1885.

American Presbyterianism: Its Origin and Growth. 1885.

Messianic Prophecy (first of intended series of 3 vols.). N. Y. 1886.

Whither? A Theological Question for the Times. 1889.

The last mentioned book has, probably, attracted most attention. This was due not only to the fact that it was a contribution to the Revision controversy, but especially to the attitude of the work, which charges those who have assumed the position of chief defenders of orthodoxy with being themselves unwittingly the exemplars of departure. It aims also to show that the historic lines of the faith, even among the Westminster Divines, were broader and more catholic than those within which the so-called conservative school of thought would confine the church to-day. Naturally the book has provoked antagonism, but has been widely welcomed by men on either side of the controversy, as most timely and suggestive.

“American Presbyterianism” is a contribution of rare historical matter, for the most part new, to the subject of which it treats. Dr. Briggs has given many years to the investigation of original documents connected with the founding of the Presbyterian Church. Through a munificent fund placed at his disposal by David H. McAlpin, Esq., and many visits to England and Scotland, he has secured a library consisting of bound volumes, pamphlets, manuscript sermons, and letters, which covers the entire period of the making of the Westminster Symbols. The archives of Puritanism have

also been ransacked with equal assiduity. Together with Drs. H. M. Dexter and Alex. Mitchell, Prof. Briggs has turned an immense flood of light through those old cob-webbed windows of the history of the American Church.

Prof. Briggs is now engaged in company with Canon Driver of Oxford and Dr. Francis Brown of Union Seminary, in preparing a Hebrew Lexicon, based upon that monumental work of Gesenius and Robinson. His special task will relate to the Hebrew terms bearing upon Biblical Theology, so far as these terms may come within the range of strict lexicography.

Prof. Briggs received the title of Doctor of Divinity from both Princeton and Edinburgh Universities. He is well known on both sides of the Atlantic; but is to be better known,—as may be predicted of one who has reached the foremost rank among the scholars of his day, and has not yet turned his fiftieth year.

They who regard Dr. Briggs as simply a great scholar and controversialist will do him an injustice. No one surpasses him in his interest in practical Christian work. He is thoroughly conversant with the popular movements suggested by the Christian Endeavor Society, Y. M. C. A., Salvation Army, etc., and has written much on Church Guilds. As a member of Presbytery he is prominently identified with all ecclesiastical matters that concern that body: and among the pastors of New York City there are few who evince more interest than he in the various forms of evangelistic work.

It will not be aside from the purpose of this article to speak of the personality of Dr. Briggs. They who know him best feel a double charm from his splendid ability as a scholar, and his moral traits. He is the embodiment of loyalty; loyalty to his own convictions and to all who are working with him. He carries little of the small change of conventional gossip, but in speaking upon important topics has coin bright as it is weighty. For this reason he is one of the most popular members of the several literary and ministerial circles to which he belongs. He has a natural gift for polemics, and rejoices in the clang of a good blow, even though it fall upon his own armor. Taking no offence at

any challenge of his own opinions, he feels no discourtesy in challenging the opinions of others. While he does not hesitate to designate any doctrine he may be opposing by the free use of the names of its chief advocates, and quotations from their writings, yet no controversialist writes with less personal bias. This is so well known by those who are familiar with him that many of his chief opponents in debate are among his most intimate personal friends. He is quick to resent unwarranted depreciation of the views of others, and to stand for their defense; but, at the same time, is apparently indifferent to personal attacks upon himself. He delights to help younger scholars in the Seminary and ministry, by opening to them the rich stores which for a quarter of a century he has been gathering for himself. To Union Seminary with its varied interests he is supremely devoted; and, in return, has the confidence and grateful esteem of Directors and patrons, to an extent that might well be coveted by any Professor.*

*Since the above was written the Directors have shown their appreciation in a most marked manner by transferring Dr. Briggs to the new chair of Biblical Theology which has been endowed through the liberality of Charles Butler, Esq., in honor of the late Dr. Edward Robinson.